

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SYDNEY 0874

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, AS

SUBJ: NEW SOUTH WALES GENERAL ELECTION ON MAY 1

REF: SYDNEY 0701

1. THIS WEEK BOTH THE COALITION GOVERNMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES AND THE LABOR OPPOSITION PRESENTED THEIR POLICY STATEMENTS, THUS OFFICIALLY OPENING THE CAMPAIGN LEADING TO AN ELECTION MAY 1. SO FAR THE CAMPAIGN APPEARS TO BE A LACKLUSTER ONE INVOLVING NO GREAT ISSUES. BOTH SIDES HAVE PRESENTED A NUMBER OF TALKING POINTS FOR THEIR RESPECTIVE PLATFORMS, MOSTLY REVOLVING AROUND REDUCTION OF TAXES, IMPROVED TRANSPORT AND IMPROVED EDUCATION AS WELL AS OTHER LOCAL ISSUES. EACH SIDE CHARGES THE OTHER WITH MAKING FALSE AND EXTRAVAGANT PROMISES. THUS FAR NEITHER SIDE HAS CAPTURED THE INITIATIVE IN THIS FIELD.

2. THE ELECTION, HOWEVER, IS BEING CONDUCTED AGAINST A BACKGROUND WHICH INVOLVES VARIOUS IMPONDERABLES.
A. TO WHAT EXTENT CAN THE LABOR PARTY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, LED BY NEVILLE WRAN, BE STUCK WITH THE ALBATROSS OF THE FEDERAL LABOR PARTY'S DISASTROUS PERFORMANCE? RECOGNIZING HIS VULNERABILITY, WRAN HAS FORTHRIGHTLY ASKED THE FEDERAL LABOR PARTY TO STAY OUT OF THE CAMPAIGN, A REQUEST WHICH IS CONFIDENTIAL

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APPARENTLY BEING GENERALLY OBSERVED BY MOST LABOR POLITICIANS

WITH THE PREDICTABLE EXCEPTION OF WHITLAM WHO HAS AGREED TO SPEAK FOR CERTAIN LABOR CANDIDATES IN THE STATE ELECTION. THE LIBERAL PARTY OPENED ITS CAMPAIGN WITH TV CARTOON ADS WHICH LINK WRAN TO THE UNHAPPY SEQUENCE OF FEDERAL LABOR DISASTERS, BUT AFTER A FEW DAYS IT CANCELLED THIS AD AND HAVE NOW SHIFTED TO POSITIVE ADVERTISING OF THEIR OWN PROGRAM.

B. TO WHAT EXTENT CAN LABOR BENEFIT FROM PUBLIC BOREDOM WITH THE RATHER PEDESTRIAN PERFORMANCE OF THE COALITION OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS? THE EIGHT-YEAR ASKIN REGIME WAS MODERATELY SATISFACTORY BUT NOT REPEAT NOT OUTSTANDING. THE ONE-YEAR INTERLUDE OF PREMIER LEWIS WAS AN UNHAPPY PERIOD WHICH MAY DOG PREMIER WILLIS.

C. TO WHAT EXTENT CAN WILLIS BENEFIT FROM THE PRESUMPTION THAT HE CAN OBTAIN GREATER FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT THAN A LABOR GOVERNMENT UNDER WRAN COULD OBTAIN? APPARENTLY NEW SOUTH WALES WILL BENEFIT CONSIDERABLY FROM INCREASED ALLOCATIONS MADE AT LAST WEEK'S PREMIER'S CONFERENCE, BUT AS WRAN IMMEDIATELY POINTED OUT, ONCE MADE, THESE ALLOCATIONS WOULD BE AVAILABLE TO A LABOR GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS A COALITION GOVERNMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT WOULD BE NATURAL TO INFER THAT WILLIS WOULD BE BETTER ABLE TO CONTINUE TO OBTAIN SUCH ALLOCATIONS THAN WOULD WRAN.

D. TO WHAT EXTENT HAS WILLIS BEEN ABLE TO PLUG THE HOLES BY A SERIES OF RECENT MEASURES, SUCH AS ABOLITION OF PETROL TAX, REDUCTION OF PAYROLL AND LAND TAXES, ORDERING OF 200 NEW BUSES AND PROMISES OF IMPROVED EDUCATION? TO SOME EXTENT WILLIS' POSITION IN MAKING THESE MOVES IS IMPROVED BY THE BREVITY OF HIS TENURE, SO FAR BARELY THREE MONTHS. BECAUSE OF THIS, HE NEED NOT ACCEPT PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR PREVIOUS FAULTS AND HIS OWN REPUTATION WILL STRENGTHEN HIS POSITION.

E. AS ELECTION DAY DRAWS CLOSER, TO WHAT EXTENT WILL THE INDEPENDENT VOTER TEND TO OPT FOR THE KNOWN, IF UNINSPIRING, COALITION GOVERNMENT OR FOR THE UNKNOWN AND UNCERTAIN CHANGE TO LABOR? LIBERAL PARTY BELIEVES WILLIS' REPUTATION WILL PROVIDE "A SAFE FALL-BACK" FOR

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THE UNCERTAIN INDEPENDENT VOTER.

F. TO WHAT EXTENT WILL SPECIFIC CONTESTS BE DECIDED ON THE FOREGOING GENERAL BASIS OR ON THE BASIS OF LOCAL PERSONALITIES? INFORMED LEADERS ON ALL POLITICAL SIDES SEEM TO AGREE THAT THE ELECTION WILL BE CLOSE AND INVOLVE NO GREAT SWING IN ANY DIRECTION. THE COALITION PRIVATELY ACKNOWLEDGES THEY WILL NOT TAKE MANY SEATS AWAY FROM LABOR

AND THEY WILL PROBABLY LOSE SOME TO LABOR. LABOR PRIVATELY ACKNOWLEDGES THAT LOCAL PERSONALITIES WILL INFLUENCE SEVERAL CRITICAL CONTESTS AND THAT IF THEY WIN, IT WILL BE CLOSE.

3. LIBERALS BELIEVE THEY HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO INFLUENCE THE ELECTION IN THE LAST WEEK BY EMPHASIZING LABOR'S COMMITMENT TO TWO CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES:

A. PARTICIPATORY INDUSTRIAL MANAGEMENT INVOLVING MOVEMENT TOWARD EQUAL EMPLOYEE AND UNION PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION MAKING.

B. RETURN TO "THE DAY LABOR SYSTEM" USED BY PREVIOUS LABOR GOVERNMENTS TO EXECUTE GOVERNMENT CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS BY DIRECT LABOR HIRE RATHER THAN CONTRACTING TO LOWEST BIDDER.

4. THERE IS LITTLE BASIS FOR ANY PREDICTION TODAY AND THE OUTCOME WILL PROBABLY IMMEDIATELY NOT BE GREATLY SIGNIFICANT. IN THE LONG RUN, HOWEVER, THE CONTROL OF THE LARGEST, MOST POPULOUS INDUSTRIAL STATE BY LABOR COULD BE A THORN IN THE SIDE OF THE FEDERAL COALITION GOVERNMENT.
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